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ABSTRACT

Language assessment procedures developed by the Houston Independent School District were undertaken to identify limited-English-speaking-ability (LESA) students, mostly Mexican-Americans, for bilingual instruction. Six phases of program development were included: (1) goals, policies and procedures; (2) language assessment; (3) instructional programs; (4) recruitment and hiring of bilingual teachers; (5) staff development; and (6) community involvement. A six-step language assessment procedure was implemented: a parent survey; identification of LESA students needing further assessment, using achievement test scores; a teacher survey; identification of students with English language deficiencies, using the Language Assessment Scales; enrollment in bilingual programs; and testing students for placement in the bilingual program. It was found that assessing proficiency in English and the home language, including frequency and patterns of usage in each language and language achievement, helped to overcome some of the weakensses in the identification procedures. (Appendices include the Parent Survey of Home Language--English and Spanish versions, and the teacher Survey of Student Language). (MH)

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LANGUAGE ASSESSMENT PROCEDURES

FOR

IDENTIFYING LESA STUDENTS

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LANGUAGE ASSESSMENT PROCEDURES FOR IDENTIFYING LESA STUDENTS

State and federal law require that Limited-English-Speaking Ability (LESA) students be provided with instruction in both English and their native or home language (Teitebaum & Hillar, 1977). Procedures for identifying students for programs of bilingual instruction are also subject to state and federal regulation. The most influential guideline has been a document entitled "Task Force Findings Specifying Remedies Available for Eliminating Past Educational Practices Ruled Unlawful Under Lau vs. Nichols (Lau Remedies)" published by the Office for Civil Rights in 1975 (cf., Alston, Note 1). However, regulations regarding the identification of LESA students, particularly at the state level in Texas, have been in a state of change. As a result of these changes in state regulations and of the increasing federal pressures, many districts are developing and implementing new procedures for identifying LESA students. This paper presents the language assessment procedures which have been developed over the past two years by the Houston Independent School District (HISD) to comply with state and federal regulations.

Initial steps toward the development of the HISD procedure began in January 1976. A task force was formed at the direction of the General Superintendent to review the requirements of the Lau vs. Nichols decision and to make recommendations for serving LESA students. A committee of educators and involved citizens reviewed the Lau decision and a series of meetings were held to hear from legal advisors, professional educators and citizen groups. In May 1976, the task force made a set of recommendations for complying with the Lau vs Nichols decision. One of the recommendations of the task force was that a district-wide language usage test be developed or selected to identify students for bilingual progams.

In July 1976, the district obtained a small federal grant to determine the student data requirements of state and federal legislation and court decisions. In particular, the grant focused on identifying the requirements for serving LESA students and developing needs projection procedures.

The research staff produced a series of studies concerning the number of LESA students to be served, the number of bilingual teachers needed, the estimated costs, the legal requirements, and a suggested framework for screening and language assessment.

In November and December 1976, consultants from the Intercultural Development Research Association met with HISD staff members to plan the expansion and improvement of bilingual programs in HISD. The IDRA consultants provided a framework for the HISD personnel's use in expressing their professional judgment of how to expand and improve the existing bilingual programs. The plan discussed policy, improving current bilingual programs, creating a transition plan, and consideration of all elements that are related to serving the Mexican American Student.

HISD personnel (notably the head of the basic skills program and the bilingual education staff) were responsible for preparing "Proposals for Improving Bilingual Education" which were approved by the HISD school board in August 1977. The proposals discussed (1) goals, policies and procedures; (2) language assessment; (3) instructional programs; (4) recruitment and hiring of bilingual teachers; (5) staff development; and (6) community involvement.

The approval by the school board of these proposals authorized additional staff to be hired to develop and expand the bilingual education programs. A top priority in these endeavors was the development of screening and language assessment procedures.

During the 1977-78 school year, additional research staff were hired to develop and implement language assessment procedures which identify students for bilingual programs. Based on earlier reports, an initial procedure was developed and piloted in the Spring of 1978. The procedure used achievement data (ITBS), parent surveys of student home language, teacher surveys of student language, and tests of oral language proficiency in English to screen students for bilingual programs. The results of the pilot study were used to revise the procedures and to develop a plan for implementation in the 1978-79 school year.

Action by state and federal agencies during the late spring and summer of 1978, however, stimulated further revision in the procedures which were scheduled for implementation. In July, the Texas Education Agency published a new state plan for bilingual education which included new guidelines for identifying students. At approximately the same time, the district also received notification of ineligibility for ESAA funding from the Department of Health, Education, and Welfare (HEW). The ineligibility determination focused on the district's procedures for identifying students for bilingual programs and on the provision of services. Through negotiation with the office of Civil Rights (OCR), the district developed a waiver plan, the Houston Plan for Bilingual Education Programs, in which language assessment procedures for identifying students for programs were specified. While the procedures developed by the district were consistent with most of the requirements by OCR, the negotiations did lead to some revisions in the implementation plan as late as August 1978. Because of the extensive planning and development prior to the summer of 1978 the district was already in the process of implementing the programs and procedures required by the waiver.

OVERVIEW OF LESA IDENTIFICATION PROCEDURES

As part of the waiver plan, the district agreed to implement the following six step language assessment procedure:

1. Administer Parent Survey

   A Parent Survey of Student Home Language (Appendix A) was to be sent to the parent or guardian of every student in the district. The parent survey was printed in English and in Spanish, as Spanish is the language spoken by a majority of the parents who speak a language other than English. For languages other than English or Spanish, community volunteers were recruited by the school to translate home surveys into the other languages spoken in the community.

The results of the parent survey were used to determine the languages spoken in the home. Students were referred for further language assessment if:

1. The parent indicated that the language first learned by the student was other than English.

OR

2. The parent indicated that a language other than English is heard in the home.

II. Identifying Students with Achievement Data

The achievement of all students identified in Step I was reviewed. All those students scoring below the 45th percentile on available standardized tests of achievement or who were not previously tested were to be referred for further assessment. Students identified in Step I who were achieving satisfactorily (above the 45th percentile) were to be continued in the regular program for further assessment regardless of achievement data if the staff felt that the student was a limited English speaker.

III. Administer Teacher Survey

A Teacher Survey of Student Language (Appendix B) was administered for every student identified in Step II. The teacher survey was used to determine whether a language other than English was spoken in school, the students relative ability to use the English language, and the general level of achievement of the student. The results of the teacher and parent surveys were combined to determine the student's need for bilingual programs or for further assessment.

If both surveys agreed that the student was limited English-speaking, the student was listed as eligible for bilingual programs. The surveys agree if:

1. The teacher indicated that the student spoke a language other than English in the classroom.

2. The teacher indicated that the student understood or spoke little or no English.

AND

1. The parent indicated that the language first learned by the student was other than English.

2. The parent indicated that a language other than English was spoken in the home.

3. The parent indicated that the student frequently heard, understood, and spoke a language other than English.

If the surveys disagreed (i.e., produced a pattern of responses which failed to satisfy the criteria outlined above) or if no parent survey was available for the student, the student was referred for a test of English language proficiency.

IV. Identify Student with Test of English Language Proficiency

A test of English language proficiency (Language Assessment Scales (LAS) developed by De Avila and Duncan and published by Linguametrics Group) was administered to students identified in Step III, and to students referred by staff or parents. Students (K-5) who scored lower than 75 on level I of the LAS and students (6-12) who scored lower than 82 on level II of the LAS were identified as eligible for bilingual programs.

V. Enrollment in Bilingual Programs

Within 10 days of enrolling students in a program, the parent or guardian was notified in both English and in the home language. The parent or guardian was informed that their child had been identified as eligible for a bilingual education/ESL program. All students listed as eligible were enrolled subject to the availability of programs. Parents who did not wish their children placed in a bilingual program (k-5) or an ESL program (6-12) signed a statement to that effect before their children could continue in the regular education program. The statement encouraged the parent or guardian to enroll their child in the program.

VI. Testing in Bilingual Programs

Following enrollment in a bilingual/ESL program results of the LAS were to be used to categorize students into the following instructional levels of English language development:

Level 1 - Non-English speaker; speaks little or no English
Level 2 - Speaks and understands some English with apparent linguistic deficiencies.
Level 3 - Limited English speaker; speaks and understands English but has some difficulty performing ordinary classwork because of limited language facility.

In addition, the teachers in bilingual programs (k-5) administered the LAS in Spanish and used results to classify the student into the following instructional levels of Spanish language development:

Level 1 - Non-Spanish speaker; speaks little or no Spanish.
Level 2 - Speaks and/or understands some Spanish with linguistic deficiencies.
Level 3 - Limited Spanish; speaks and understands Spanish, but has some difficulty performing classwork because of limited facility.
Level 4 - Speaks Spanish and understands well.

Categorization of the student into an instructional level were used by the teacher to prescribe appropriate instructional programs in each language where appropriate or to refer the student for special education services.

PROBLEMS IN THE DESIGN OF THE PROCEDURES

Some problems in the design of the assessment procedures and with the enrollment criteria became evident as schools began testing and enrolling students in Bilingual/ESL programs.

Under the above procedures, students who hear a language other than English in the home, who are achieving below the 45th percentile on standardized tests and who score level III and below on the English LAS were enrolled in Bilingual programs. As schools began enrolling students which satisfied these criteria, they reported that many students who scored level III and below on the LAS also had parent surveys which indicated that the student did not frequently speak the other language heard in the home or who understood very little of what was said in this language. Many of these students when tested on the Spanish LAS, also had lower proficiency scores in Spanish than in English. The district's transitional bilingual programs were designed to provide instruction in a language other than English for students who experience difficulty in an all English curriculum because they speak or understand another language. It was therefore inappropriate to enroll underachieving students who were primarily English speakers in these programs.

The solution to this problem was to assess the student's proficiency in his home language before enrollment in the program. By testing students in the Spanish LAS prior to enrollment, school staff had objective measures of the student's relative language proficiency in English and Spanish. These objective measures were then combined with information concerning the frequency and domains of language usage from the parent and teacher surveys to determine the student's relative proficiency in English and his home language and his pattern of language usage. This information was used by school staffs to determine a student's need for bilingual instruction.

Bilingual instruction was required for students who were limited in English proficiency, who were more proficient in their home language than in English and who frequently used the home language with family and friends. Students who were less proficient in their home language than in English and who frequently used English with their family and friends did not receive Bilingual instruction. These students remained in an all English curriculum with emphasis on oral language development. For students who have equally limited proficiency in English and their home language who have a mixed pattern of English and other language usage with family and friends, staff judgement was used to determine the need for bilingual instruction. For these students, staffs could use attendance and classroom performance as indicators of a student's need for bilingual instruction.

The above problem in the design of the procedures and the suggested solution illustrates an important point in designing procedures to identify LESA students. The point is that multiple data sources are essential in determining a student's need for bilingual instruction (Alston and Mauldin, 1979). The problem with the district's procedure arose because little of the of the available information was originally used in deter-

mining eligibility for the program. Knowledge that a language other than English is heard by the student in the home and a test of English language proficiency were not sufficient in determining a student's ability to function in a bilingual classroom. Procedures identified students for instruction in a language other than English prior to assessing their ability to function in this language. By assessing proficiency in English and the home language, frequency and patterns of usage in each language and achievement, school staffs had a broader data base upon which to judge a student's potential for functioning in either a bilingual or an all English curriculum.

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The Proposed Houston Plan for Bilingual Education Programs

APPENDICES

MTST-8/78

HOUSTON INDEPENDENT SCHOOL DISTRICT
PARENT SURVEY
OF
HOME LANGUAGE

Student's Name:_____ School:_____

Teacher:_____ Grade:_____

1. What language did your child learn first?

   English_____ Spanish_____ Other (Please specify)_____

2. Does your child hear a language other than English spoken at home? Yes._____ No_____

   If answer to No. 2 is YES, please answer the following questions:

3. What is the other language which your child hears?_____

4. Does your child hear this language spoken (Please check one.)

   a. most of the time? _____

   b. some of the time? _____

   c. not very often? _____

5. When this language is spoken, does your child understand (Please check one.)

   a. most of what is said? _____

   b. some of what is said? _____

   c. very little of what is said? _____

   d. nothing of what is said? _____

6. Does your child speak this other language? Yes_____ No_____

7. Does your child speak this other language (Please check one.)

   a. most of the time? _____

   b. some of the time? _____

   c. not very often? _____

8. Does your child frequently speak a language other than English with these groups:

   Friends? _____ Yes _____ No

   Brothers and Sisters? _____ Yes _____ No

   Parents/Grandparents? _____ Yes _____ No

   Other? _____ Please specify:_____

Date:_____ Signed:_____
Parent/Guardian

MTST 8/78 33.3900

Distrito Escolar Independiente De Houston
Encuesta Dirigida A Los Padres
Sobre
Lengua Materna De Estudiantes

Nombre del alumno: _____ Escuela: _____

Maestro: _____ Grado: _____

1. ¿Qúe lengua aprendió primero su hijo (a)?

   inglés _____ español _____ otra (favor de especificar) _____

2. ¿Escucha su niño(a) algún idioma aparte de inglés en su hogar? Sí _____ No _____

   Si la respuesta a número 2 es sí, favor de contesta. las siguientes preguntas:

3. ¿Cuál es el idioma que su niño(a) escucha? _____

4. ¿Escucha su niño(a) este idioma (Favor anote una)

   a. Casi siempre? _____
   b. Parte del tiempo? _____
   c. De vez en cuando? _____

5. ¿Cuando se habla este idioma, entiende su niño(a): (Favor anote una)

   a. Casi todo lo que se dice? _____
   b. Algo de lo que se dice? _____
   c. Muy poco de lo que se dice? _____

6. ¿Habla su niño(a) este otro idioma? Sí _____ No _____

7. ¿Habla su niño(a) este otro idioma (Favor anote una)

   a. Casi todo el tiempo? _____
   b. Parte del tiempo? _____
   c. De vez en cuando? _____

8. ¿Habla su hijo(a) con frecuencia alguna lengua que no sea inglés con los grupos siguientes?

   Amigos: _____ Sí _____ No

   Hermanos: _____ Sí _____ No

   Padres/Abuelos: _____ Sí _____ No

   Otros: _____ Favor de especificar _____

Firma del Padre: _____

12

Fecha: _____

HOUSTON INDEPENDENT SCHOOL DISTRICT
TEACHER SURVEY
OF
STUDENT LANGUAGE

This survey is used to determine the language proficiency of students who may speak a language other than Engli. Please complete the survey on all students whose:

1. Parent survey indicates that the language first learned by the student was other than English, or
2. Parent survey indicates that a language other than English is spoken in the home.

Student's Name: _____ Grade: _____

Student's I.D. No: _____ Date: _____

School: _____ Teacher: _____

1. a. Has the student ever spoken a language other than English in the classroom? _____ (1) Yes _____ (2) No

   b. If Yes, indicate language spoken: _____ (1) Spanish _____ (2) Other: (Please specify) _____

2. Does the student usually speak a language other than English with his friends? _____ (1) Yes _____ (2) No

3. Please rate how much the student understands his/her teacher when the teacher is speaking English:

   _____ (4) Understands little or no English.
   _____ (3) Understands some English but not enough to understand his teacher in the classroom.
   _____ (2) Understands English but does not understand it as much as native English-speaking students of his/her age.
   _____ (1) Understands English as well as native English-speaking students of his/her age.

4. Please rate how well the student speaks English.

   _____ (4) Speaks little or no English
   _____ (3) Speaks some English but not enough to be understood by his/her teacher in the classroom
   _____ (2) Speaks English but not as well as native English-speaking students of the same age.
   _____ (1) Speaks English as well as native English-speaking students.

5. Please rate how well the student reads English. (Rate only for students in the second grade and above)

   _____ (4) Reads little or no English.
   _____ (3) Reads some English
   _____ (2) Reads English but not as well as native English-speaking students of the same age.
   _____ (1) Reads English as well as native English-speaking students.

6. Please rate how well the student writes English. (Rate only for students in the second grade and above.)

   _____ (4) Writes little or no English
   _____ (3) Writes some English
   _____ (2) Writes English but not as well as native English-speaking students of the same age.
   _____ (1) Writes English as well as native English-speaking students.

Based on your judgment, rank the student's proficiency in English for each language area listed below by checking the one most appropriate statement in each area:

7. Pronunciation

   _____ (5) Pronunciation problems so severe as to make speech almost unintelligible.
   _____ (4) Very hard to understand because of pronunciation problems. Must frequently be asked to repeat.
   _____ (3) Pronunciation problems necessitate concentrated listening and occasionally lead to misunderstanding.
   _____ (2) Always intelligible, though one is conscious of a definite accent.
   _____ (1) Has few traces of foreign accent.

8. Grammar

   _____ (5) Errors in grammar and word order so severe as to make speech virtually unintelligible.
   _____ (4) Grammar and word order errors make comprehension difficult. Must often rephrase sentences and/or restrict himself to basic patterns.

_____ (3) Makes frequent errors of grammar and word order which occasionally obscure meaning.
_____ (2) Occasionally makes grammatical and/or word-order errors which do not, however, obscure meaning.
_____ (1) Makes few (if any) noticeable errors of grammar or word order.

9. Vocabulary

_____ (5) Vocabulary limitations so extreme as to make conversation virtually impossible.
_____ (4) Misuse of words and very limited vocabulary make comprehension quite difficult.
_____ (3) Frequently uses the wrong words; conversation somewhat limited because of inadequate vocabulary.
_____ (2) Sometimes uses inappropriate terms and/or must rephrase ideas because of a lack of vocabulary.
_____ (1) Use of vocabulary is virtually that of a native speaker.

10. Fluency

_____ (5) Speech is so fragmentary as to make conversation virtually impossible.
_____ (4) Frequently forced into silence by language limitations.
_____ (3) Speed and fluency are strongly affected by language problems.
_____ (2). Speed of speech is slightly affected by language problems.
_____ (1) Speech is as fluent and effortless as that of a native speaker.

11. Comprehension

_____ (5) Cannot be said to understand even simple conversational English.
_____ (4) Has great difficulty following what is said. Can comprehend only "social conversation" spoken slowly and with frequent repetitions.
_____ (3) Understands most of what is said at slower-than-normal speed with repetitions.
_____ (2) Understands nearly everything at normal speed, although occasionally repetition may be necessary.
_____ (1) Appears to understand everything without difficulty.

Signed: _____
Teacher

Date: _____